

**CITY COUNCIL BUDGET SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
May 10, 2004
7:00 P.M.**

MAYOR JEFFREY A GRAHAM PRESIDING

PRESENT: **COUNCILMAN STEPHEN J. BRADLEY
COUNCILWOMAN ROXANNE M. BURNS
COUNCILMAN PETER L. CLOUGH
COUNCILMAN TIMOTHY R. LABOUF
MAYOR GRAHAM**

ALSO PRESENT: **CITY MANAGER MARY M. CORRIVEAU**

Prior to the beginning of the budget session, Mayor Graham informed Council members that he had asked Mrs. Corriveau to call DEC relative to the salt pile issue. American Salt is planning to cover the pile once it is completed.

Councilman LaBouf mentioned that someone had contacted him about the City's website. He explained that the individual thought the site was great. However, a suggestion was made that the City should do a better job of welcoming people to the community by putting information about schools, media, churches and restaurants on the site.

Councilman LaBouf also remarked that Norman Wayte had contacted him concerning a rental house on William Street that is extremely run down and where twenty to thirty people are congregating at all times of the day and night. Councilman LaBouf stated that Mr. Wayte indicated that the neighbors had contacted the landlord and apparently he chooses not to do anything about it.

Councilman Clough commented that he has received complaints about the number of cars parking on the Seward Street hill. He explained that it is very dangerous to do so and the neighbors have requested "no parking" signs in that area.

Councilman Clough also referred to the situation he and Councilwoman Burns had concerning all of the computer viruses as a result of their personal email addresses being out in the public.

Mrs. Corriveau stated that if Council so desires, they can have City email addresses and the viruses would be stopped by the City's system.

BUDGET SESSION:

Debt Limit

City Comptroller James E. Mills presented the Council with information regarding the percentage of debt limit exhausted by the City of Watertown compared to the other cities in New York for 2002. Watertown ranked 6th at 60.82%. In 2000, the City ranked highest in exhausting its debt limit at 67.59%. In 2001, the City ranked 3rd highest in exhausting its debt limit at 67.59%. The city only trailed Buffalo (81.46%) and Rochester (74.83%).

Airport

Mrs. Corriveau presented Council with new budget pages outlining the savings at the airport as a result of the County's take over. She explained that some equipment still had to be purchased prior to the change and also the 840 account for workman's compensation would still be the City's responsibility. Mrs. Corriveau explained that the City will save \$376,797 in expenses associated with operating the airport, but will have a loss of \$79,000 in revenue from federal aid and airport fees and rentals, for a net savings of \$297,797 in 2004-05. Mrs. Corriveau explained that not all costs could be halved because some costs aren't divided over the entire fiscal year. With these savings, the tax rate increase would then be 1.77%.

Councilman Clough asked about the five positions at the airport.

Mrs. Corriveau explained that the County wants to interview the employees and make those decisions. The union has been put on notice of this. She explained that she couldn't answer the question concerning if any of them will be at the airport after January, because she just doesn't know at this point. However, she doesn't want to see anyone go into the holiday season wondering if they are going to keep their jobs.

Discussion was held relative to keeping the five employees. Mayor Graham commented that in adopting these numbers into the budget, it could result in layoffs. Mrs. Corriveau stated that it could, but they would look at absorbing them into the City where possible.

Councilman Clough suggested that a freeze be put on positions opening up from September and October to allow for vacancies, which could be used to absorb these employees.

Mrs. Corriveau remarked that it would be advantageous to be as aggressive as possible with the County on the resolution of the personnel issue.

Mr. Hayes commented that it is inconceivable that the County would take over the airport and not take some of these employees, due to their expertise in the paperwork requirements alone.

Discussion was held relative to the airport security requirements. Mr. Hayes explained that the security only needs to be provided when the passengers arrive. It is intermittent. Mrs. Corriveau explained that a police officer is taken off regular patrol to go to the airport and cover the security for that time period. The officer is still only working his regular shift.

Mayor Graham asked about the equipment and if some of it could be brought in and used by the City.

Mr. Hayes explained that the equipment was mostly purchased through FAA grants and therefore must stay at the airport.

Mrs. Corriveau advised Council that she has asked to meet with Mr. Hagemann next week to discuss the transfer.

Council members discussed the home rule legislation and the fact that it still has to be approved by the State. However, Council members were confident that this would go through.

Council concurred that the new figures presented by Mrs. Corriveau should be put in the budget.

Capital Budget

Council discussed the various parking lot projects in the capital budget.

Discussion was held relative to putting the small expenditures, such as the \$25,000 for the lot on **page 193**, into the operating budget.

Mrs. Corriveau explained that police vehicles used to be in the operating budget. A few years ago, they were put in the capital budget. The first year saves the City money. However, in the second year the City pays much more, plus the interest.

In discussing priorities, Mrs. Corriveau advised the Council that the projects that are in the budget are the ones with high priority.

Councilwoman Burns commented that the City Hall parking lot (**page 204**) does need to be done. She also commented that the Court Street lot was cut out of last year's budget because of low usage.

Mr. Hayes explained that the Court Street lot is starting to fail in areas and if an overlay isn't done, a whole reconstruction would have to be done. He also explained that once a project is agreed to under the capital budget, it stays in it, until the project is done.

It was also explained that the Stream deal encumbers a good portion of the lot and the City has had discussions with them about allowing public parking in certain areas.

Mrs. Corriveau reviewed the background of the Arcade Street lot **(page 205)**

Councilman Clough remarked that much of the discussion at that time dealt with the City's \$500,000 debt concerning the Court House complex.

Councilwoman Burns commented that it is important not to lose sight of the reason the City purchased those buildings, which was to add short-term parking in that area.

Discussion was held relative to whether or not the County might be interested in taking over the lot. Councilwoman Burns commented that if the County takes ownership of it, it would eventually become a County lot and would not have public parking.

Mrs. Corriveau will ask Planning to look at the plans to see if anymore spaces could be added to the lot.

Councilwoman Burns suggested that Court Street lot and Arcade Street lot both be left in the capital budget and just move the City Hall lot to the operating budget.

Councilman Clough commented that if this were done, something would have to be taken out of the operating budget to offset it.

Councilman Clough wondered if any businesses around the Court Street lot would be interested in purchasing it.

Councilwoman Burns asked what the incentive would be.

Councilman Clough responded that it would be the same incentive as other large businesses have when they have their own lots.

Mrs. Corriveau explained that businesses in downtown areas locate there because there are municipal lots that provide parking for their customers and are maintained by the municipality.

Mayor Graham questioned the need to maintain 267 spaces in the Court Street lot. He suggested reducing the area that the City maintains.

Councilman LaBouf asked if there were certain areas in the lot that were worse than others and if certain portions of the project could be done in phases.

Mr. Hayes commented that he would rather have half of the lot made into greenspace than to sell it.

Councilwoman Burns remarked that there have been discussions with the downtown development specialist and the downtown businesses relative to an access road that would connect the J.B.Wise lot and the Court Street lot all the way through the back.

Mrs. Corriveau commented that this issue could be on the table for discussion Wednesday night at the downtown streetscape meeting.

Councilwoman Burns commented that she would like to work out a deal with Stream to free up parking in the Woolworth lot.

Mrs. Corriveau explained that the City has had discussions with the North Country Children's Clinic about combining the two entrances into one, which would also affect the parking in this lot.

Councilman Clough remarked that if these issues are going to be addressed, the projects need to be kept in the capital budget.

The roof project for the DPW administration building (page 197) was discussed. Council was advised that this roof project was approved last year, however because of a combination of time and funding constraints, was not initiated. In addition, Council reviewed plans for the roof project at the Mill Street Fire Station **(page 199).**

Councilman LaBouf asked if the rehabilitation of the Quonset at Thompson Park could be put off for another year.

Mrs. Corriveau reminded Council that these projects don't impact this year's budget and if City Council wishes to establish a lower limit for bonding, they can.

Mr. Hayes commented that a new Quonset would probably cost around \$13,000 to \$15,000 as opposed to the \$30,000 to rehab the old one.

Councilwoman Burns commented that the conservancy has done a beautiful job up there and this building is ugly and something needs to be done.

Mayor Graham asked for information on both options.

Council discussed the field drainage at the fairgrounds **(page198).** Mr. Hayes explained that the drainage wasn't done at the time of the Bellew Avenue project. The problem is most apparent along the connector road. The work could be done in-house and would be tied into the Western Outfall Trunk Sewer located just to the west of the fieldplex. Included in this project would be piping and infilling of the drainage swale north of the Ice Arena.

Council reviewed the request for the electrical generator for the Municipal Building **(page200)**. Mrs. Corriveau advised Council that City Hall has an old generator and it doesn't have enough power to keep the building up and running. She also explained that all of the main servers for all the communications are in City Hall.

Councilwoman Burns referred to the request for a Battalion Chief's vehicle. She stated that the current vehicle, which is 11 years old, does not have high mileage at 41,000. In addition, she remarked that this is not a first responder vehicle. She also commented that she understood that the vehicle would not be replaced, but would be recycled. However, she stated that she would not support an SUV. She stated that she made the mistake of supporting one before and has regretted it ever since. She stated that it serves no function but getting from point A to point B. In addition, she stated that she has had comments from residents wondering why the Chief has to have an SUV sitting in his driveway just to drive around the City in.

Discussion centered on the tennis courts in Thompson Park. It was agreed that no one uses them because of their deplorable conditions and there are now very nice ones located at WHS, IHC and JCC.

While Council concurred that they would not be repaired, Councilman Clough also commented that if they are not going to be repaired, they should be removed.

Mr. Hayes said that they could be removed from the park by the end of this week.

Councilman LaBouf referred to the Main Avenue project **(page 224)**. He stated that he agreed it was in bad shape. However, he felt that it didn't get much traffic and that Factory Street was in worst shape. He asked how the priority was determined.

Councilman Clough explained that Main Avenue gets a lot of use. In addition, a promise was made by the former City Manager to a businessman who bought an empty building on the street.

Mrs. Corriveau explained that Factory Street is on the schedule for 2008-09 because the City can't pay the whole cost of the project and they are hoping by then to get help with funding it.

Mr. Pilon also explained that they didn't want to have Factory Street tied up when the Pearl Street Bridge, the State Street and the streetscape projects are all being done.

Mayor Graham commented on the Main Avenue discussion by stating that the businessman has made an investment and the City needs to follow through with their commitment.

Mr. Hayes remarked that there hasn't been a comprehensive analysis of the road system in the City done for several years. We need to have someone come in to grade and look at the existing pavement and plan maintenance strategies. He also explained that when

Mr. Hiller made the commitment, he was only looking at a \$40,000 overlay. However, if that had been done, it would have led to a severe drainage problem.

Referring to the request for a fire safety trailer **(page 220)**, Councilwoman Burns questioned the need for a 39' trailer for education and fire prevention purposes. She questioned what was going to haul it and indicated that she would like the Chief to respond to this. She stated that this type of purchase would send a wrong message in these tight fiscal times.

Assessment Department

Councilwoman Burns discussed the Assessment Department budget **(page 32)**. She remarked that since City Assessor Mrs. Norfolk, would be retiring in the near future, this would be a perfect opportunity to look at consolidating with the County. She stated that there is presently a committee looking into consolidations and this is something that they could look into. She stated that the County provides a lot of services to the 22 towns and they could provide the same to the City.

In recapping the budget session, Council concurred that the tennis courts and the Battalion Chief's SUV will be removed from the budget. The Fire Chief will be asked about the trailer.

Budget session adjourned at 9:20 p.m. The next session is scheduled for Wednesday, May 19th at 5:00 p.m. (5-7 will be discussion on capital budget, public works and recreation; 7-9 will be discussion on police and fire).

Donna M. Dutton

City Clerk